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PROGRAM The Diane Rehm Show

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SUBJECT Shining Path Guerrilla Movement in Peru

DIANE REHM: Violence in Peru has been on the rise since the emergence in 1980 of the Maoist Shining Path guerrilla movement. Sandero Luminosa (?), as the group calls itself, is one of the world's most mysterious revolutionary movements. Fanatically secretive, the group has succeeded in just five years in disrupting Peruvian society and spreading terror throughout urban and rural areas.

The government's counterattack has been equally repressive. Security forces are suspected of killing and torturing thousands of alleged Sandero supporters.

The real victims in the ongoing violence are Peru's rural peasants. Over 4000 have died since 1980, and an estimated 2000 more have disappeared.

With me this morning to discuss the rise of the Shining Path is Linda Seligman, an anthropologist specializing in Peruvian agricultural practices.

Just who are the Shining Path guerrillas and where did they come from?

LINDA SELIGMAN: The original founders of the Shining Path movement were deeply involved in activities at the University of Huamanga (?) in Ayacucho in the '60s. Ayacucho is located in the central highlands of Peru. Many of these individuals were studying at the university there. They came from peasant backgrounds, obtained an education, were deeply concerned about the welfare of the peasantry.

They became interested in a political group which was

led by Abbe Miel Guzman (?), now known as Comrade Gonzalo. He was one of the leaders of a political party which was Maoist in nature called Mandera Roja (?), the Red Flag. That party broke off and became clandestine after -- probably around in the '60s. And Abbe Miel Guzman began his proselytizing and obtained a reputation as a very popular political leader.

The originators of this movement, after studying at the university, returned to rural areas and became acquainted even more with people in the area, gained their friendship. Some of them married into these communities. And eventually, after staying there for some time, they began the third state of their literal class war, which was the destruction of those bourgeois [unintelligible] institutions.

REHM: Joining us now by phone is Scott Palmer, visiting professor of government at the Georgetown University.

We were just getting some background from Linda Seligman on the identity of the individuals who began forming the Shining Path guerrillas in Peru.

You ended, Linda, with the statement that they truly are revolutionary and wish to overthrow the Peruvian government, as it now stands.

How do you see the group, Scott? What do you think its aims are?

SCOTT PALMER: Yes. I think that Linda's analysis is right on target. It's a very unusual group, in the sense that it's really the first full-blown communist rural revolutionary group that's planted a seed in the Indian areas of the country, and has been working at it for some 20 years. And it is now in a position where it feels it can expand from those bases and begin what it feels is a genuine proletarian revolution.

REHM: Are you saying that up to now have their activities have been confined to certain areas of Peru, and they are now spreading out?

PALMER: Well, their heartland was and still is Ayacucho. That's where they started, using the university and its various extension programs in the 1960s. And that is still where, if one looks at the distribution of incidents, as published by the Peruvian government, more than half the incidents occur in Ayacucho; and then a substantial number in Lima, to which we might hypothesize that part of those are the result of connections between the Ayacucho groups and their counterparts who have migrated to the cities.

REHM: Linda, what are their tactics? How do they

operate?

SELIGMAN: One of their tactics is to spend a long time talking with the different communities about the problems of those communities, about the injustices of the Peruvian government, thereby gaining the sympathy of peasants who are discontent with the present economic and social government policies. That's how they can gain the support of the peasants so that they are protected, at least to a certain extent, by them in their activities.

Their actual tactics are very interesting. They have an extremely sophisticated knowledge of Peru's modern, contemporary infrastructure, and they concentrate on destroying symbols of this society. That includes blowing up electric power lines, high-tension wires, attacking police installations, gaining their -- they don't have that many modern weapons. They rely on raids on police installations and on raids [unintelligible] dynamite. They use knives, as well.

And there is some hypothesis, although there isn't a great deal of evidence, that they've established a working relationship with some of the drug traffickers, who also want to be protected. And through the drug traffickers, they're then able either to get funds or to get the ammunition that they need.

REHM: How large a group are we talking about?

SELIGMAN: No one is really sure of how large they are. But most guesses put it between -- somewhere between 1500 and 3000 people. They're very small.

REHM: Very small.

SELIGMAN: And they're extremely successful at what they do.

When I was in Peru at the end of December 1983, on New Year's Eve, there was a tension in the air because people are a little scared, even in the urban areas, about what could happen. And at exactly midnight, at exactly the stroke of midnight, every light in Lima went out. And they had succeeded in -- Sandero had succeeded in simultaneously blowing up seven major power lines and leaving major parts of Lima without lights for several days.

REHM: Is there, for the most part, total secrecy about the identities of the individuals who are part of the group?

SELIGMAN: There is. Most of them go by aliases. And they're organized -- from what we know, they're organized into independent cells. So that means that even one cell may not be acquainted with another cell.

But it's very -- they've published two very small policy platforms, and that's it. They've preferred not to take responsibility for their actions, as do some other guerrilla groups.

REHM: Scott, the government apparently believes the Shining Path enjoys widespread popular support. Is that true?

PALMER: No, I don't think it's true. I think there's -- one has to, I think, focus on two aspects. One is what Sandero is and what Sandero stands for in its revolutionary program, which is not shared by 85-90 percent of the Peruvian population. It has certain support for parts of its program in the heartland of what's called the Mancha Indijina (?). However, the danger of Sandero is not in its own platform, its own program, I don't believe, but rather the legitimization of violence that its actions conveys.

And my own sense is that -- Linda may disagree with me on this. But my own sense is that the activities in other parts, in many other parts of the country, such as in the Juiarga (?), with the drug traffickers and so forth, is not Sandero, but rather people taking up some of the tactics and approaches of Sandero as they learn about them, learn about them, study them, and so forth.

So I think the demonstration effect is the greatest danger for the fragile Peruvian democracy, in my judgment.

SELIGMAN: Actually, Scott, I agree with you thoroughly. And it's become very difficult to distinguish what actions are those of Sandero and what actions are those of other groups or individuals who are criminals with other goals.

And another danger is that every act of violence, every crime that is committed is now perceived by the police, by the security forces, by the government as acts of Sandero, thereby furthering the fear of the general public toward them, that this is a much wider, larger, more powerful -- a wider, larger, and more powerful group than it really is.

REHM: What about the government's counterinsurgency plan, however. How is that affecting the populous there in Peru?

SELIGMAN: Well, one of the major consequences of the government's counterinsurgency campaign has been to further violence in these areas. And even though Sandero is certainly guilty and cannot be exonerated by any means for the way it has murdered and killed, murdered and harassed people, the counterinsurgency forces have engaged in torture. People have compared their tactics to the guerrilla war in Argentina, in which -- and

they have found mass graves.

Now, this isn't only the government forces who are guilty of throwing bodies in mass graves. This is also true of the Shining Path.

One of the effects of the terror that was generated by the government forces is that it actually could lead more peasants to seek the protection of the Shining Path.

I don't know what Scott feels about their impact on the general population.

PALMER: Yes. I think there's no question. I mean, again, the numbers are very clear in this regard, that 19 --there were numerous incidents of violence that occurred in 1981 and '82. But the escalation of violence did not really develop in Ayacucho, in the emergency zone, until January of 1983, when the military began to occupy the area under military organization, under military control. And that point the confrontations became much more numerous, and hundreds of people were being killed, rather than tens or ones.

REHM: Well, now, national elections are coming up in Peru. How is all the violence likely to affect the outcome of those elections? Or even the numbers of people who turn out to vote, Linda?

SELIGMAN: I'm not sure how it will affect it. I am pretty sure that in Ayacucho it will make it very difficult for people to vote.

One of the effects of Sandero has been to cause the United Left and the OTRA (?), which is left of center, both parties to unite more against Sandero as a viable political alternative. Which means that people will have alternatives available. There are parties that are concerned both about the effects of the government forces and about the Shining Path.

I don't think it will be easy for people to vote in emergency zones. And I think there may be real fraud at the ballot box.

REHM: We are going to open the phones....

Scott, how does Shining Path differ from other resistance movements in Latin America?

PALMER: Well, it's distinguished by, first of all, from most movements, by the length of time they've been working in a single area. I gather Linda was discussing that, in part. And

that really dates from the early 1960s, '62, '63, and the fad then prevalent at many universities of the so-called folkloric theory of revolution, rural revolution, based partly on Mao, partly on Castro's success. And they took it very seriously, among the university students. And some groups in the universities [unintelligible] expanded from there, deepened it over time, learned a great deal about it through time.

So, it has very deep roots, over the years, in the communities. And that distinguishes it, in one aspect.

Secondly, it's distinguished by the fervor of its leaders. I think they're true believers. And they're true believers, in part, because they feel, they really feel they've unlocked the secret of Marx and the secret of Mao. And they've rolled up their sleeves in the countryside and they've worked. Whereas many of their radical so-called colleagues have preferred to claim the revolution rather than to actually get in the trenches and work for it.

SELIGMAN: I think that's an important point that Scott made, because one of the problems with many parties in Peru that supposedly represent the rural population is that they haven't ever lived it. They don't know what life is really like in rural areas. They think they can talk about it, but their talk is not terribly persuasive because they don't understand the living conditions in the countryside that well. And that's very different from Sandero.

REHM: From your perspective, how concerned should the United States be about what's happening in Peru right now?

SELIGMAN: My view is a little idiosyncratic in that respect. I don't think the U.S. should be concerned about Sandero taking over Peru. I think the U.S. should be much more concerned, perhaps, with the kinds of policies that the government is using against its own population.

I don't think there's an easy way to combat the Shining Path. However, I do think that Belaunde's government has been very irresponsible in the lack of attention it has paid to rural needs. We're talking about approximately 40 percent of the population, a little more or a little less. But these people's living standards have been declining since Belaunde took office. Despite the fact that an agrarian reform took place, per capita income has declined. Agricultural subsidies have been withdrawn. Investments are going into military expenditures and they're going into large-scale infrastructural projects, like irrigation projects, that really don't benefit these small southern highland communities very much.

REHM: Scott, do you want to add to that?

PALMER: I would add two points. I do think the model of development that's been pursued for the past 25 years is really part of the problem. And I think Linda has provided some of its specific manifestations in the most recent government.

The second point I would make, though, probably differs from Linda's perspective. It's based on my own research in Ayacucho in the '70s, after having been a professor at the university in the '60s when the movement was just getting started. And that's based on the -- my own view is that the agrarian reform under the military regime, the reformist military regime in the late '60s and early '70s, actually contributed to the rise of the Sandero movement in Ayacucho because it was very counterproductive in its application in that particular part of Peru.

So that in this case, a reform actually worked to strengthen a movement rather than to weaken it.

It's a very delicate issue, a difficult one to deal with, how to have the right policies apply to the people who really need it.

The problem in Ayacucho and why the land reform didn't work, in a sentence, is because there are too many Indian communities and not enough privately held land. And the land reform really worked only in the privately held land and didn't benefit the community.

REHM: We have a number of telephone callers waiting....

MAN: I noticed the extreme silence of the Soviets and the Cubans in this matter. Is it because there's been an attempt on the part of the Soviets to, in its arms deals with the Peruvian government, are they cour -- in a dilemma also as to which direction they should take? Or has it got to do with the Maoist movement and that they are, you would say, ideologically not necessarily in sympathy with the movement?

SELIGMAN: I think both questions -- I think both points are true. I think probably the Soviet Union doesn't understand any better than most of us what Sandero's real goals are. But I certainly think that its Maoist base would prevent the Soviet Union from getting terribly involved in it.

Also, I think, again, you have to talk about the question of popular support. And I don't think there's very much for Sandero in Peru.

REHM: You're on the air.

MAN: One of your guests mentioned the opposition of the

folks of Shining Path to modernity. And I was wondering if you could elaborate on that, one.

And two, address the question, if they would succeed, wouldn't they be a lot like Pol Pot?

REHM: Scott, would you like to address that question?

PALMER: Yes. I guess my response would be that, in fact, the Shining Path is on record as saying that their perception is that 60 percent of the population of Peru should be killed. That's the only way to really have an effective revolution. And it has been compared to Pol Pot, in part because of the tactics that Sandero has espoused, and in part to this, what some would call, a primitive communism of rural, primary-based communities and returning to, if you will, the Asian mode of production that was prevalent in the region, according to the theory, at least, several hundred years ago.

So I think that that's the connection, at two levels.

And the problem is that Shining Path is not very interested in propagandizing or making publicity for itself. They see that as a bourgeois approach, and they don't need any support from the bourgeois community, in their judgment.

SELIGMAN: I think that's an extremely important point, the very last one. That is, that -- I don't know whether Sandero is so much anti-modern as anti-capitalist, anti-bourgeoisie. And there are many symbols of a bourgeois state that Sandero is trying to destroy. And that includes things like electricity and the economic differentiation that certain technological skills would encourage for some people and not for others.

REHM: You're on the air.

WOMAN: I have a girlfriend who works for -- it's like the Peace Corps, but it's not the Peace Corps. Are Americans --is she in danger? Because she works with, you know...

REHM: That's a good question. Thanks so much for calling.

What about Americans who are in Peru right now? Are they undergoing any kind of risky situation?

REHM: There have been incidents. There was a case of four Danes, journalists, who were arrested when they were trying to get information in Ayacucho. However, it really depends on so many factors. It depends no where you are, how far you are from the emergency zones.

I would say that you're in as much danger from the Shining Path as you are from some of the security forces. The problem is that no one knows who anybody is anymore.

And if you're in the urban areas, I think it's less likely that you're in danger, unless you're, you know -- unless there's a bomb scare, unless there's a bomb.

However, in the rural areas, where you usually don't have many visitors and many travelers, and someone shows up who's a stranger, you do have problems, both with police who don't know who you are and with the local community members who don't know who you are.

Government bureaucrats are much more loath today to give permission to foreign scholars. And that includes Americans. And in fact, Americans' visas have been shortened to only two-months stays. Whereas other countries, like Europeans, still are allowed three months.

PALMER: ...disagree with that perspective just...

REHM: Very briefly, Scott.

PALMER: I don't think Americans have anything to fear from Sandero or from its revolutionary aspirations. That's not Sandero's thrust. And the only problem, as Linda suggests, is if you happen to be in the wrong place...

REHM: At the wrong time.

...Thank you, both, so much for being with us this morning.